

# UMS: Malaysia's first must-visit Eco-Campus



The Chancellery Building also known as the Twin Tower.



UMS clock tower.



The Chancellor Hall.



Skeleton of a Borneo pygmy elephant at Borneensis Gallery.

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By PAUL MU

UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH (UMS) ECO CAMPUS was started in 2013 as a branding for UMS Eco Campus Agenda.

It was mooted by UMS' fourth Vice Chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Mohd Harun Abdullah, who as an environmentalist, wanted to create something different for the university.

Dr Mohd Harun, who served as Vice Chancellor from 2012 to 2017, realised that UMS' strength lies in its environment since it has a beautiful topography setting, and furthermore, its vegetation was never disturbed during the construction of the university.

"I always tell visitors to UMS that since the beginning, even way before 2013, we have kept our lands very green until now our forested area is 64 per cent while our planted vegetation area is 19 per cent, so altogether about 80 per cent is still covered with greeneries.

"Some of the vegetation are planted while some are pristine before we started. I think 1995 was the groundbreaking ceremony (for the construction of UMS), then in 2000 the campus was opened. Since then we have been keeping very green until now.

"That is why we still have our UMS hill and it is very much still at its natural state. Since 2013, this is the first university that has branded itself as Eco Campus throughout Malaysia.

"And until now, only UM (University Malaya) has started to do so in 2016, but that was three years after us. Now we are already in our second phase because the first phase was in 2013 until 2017," UMS EcoCampus Management Centre, Deputy Director Kueh Boon Hee said.

The first phase was to set up the foundation of the centre in 2013, to meet the university's Eco Campus Agenda which is their blueprints consisting of all the core values (sustainable development, ecological protection, environmental compatibility, resource conservation, and environmental stewardship).

Also key elements such as mindset change, infrastructure development, teaching and learning, research themes, management, and operational practices.

They used five pillars to build the foundation of the Eco Campus Agenda and promoted it to all the 40 over departments in the university where they worked together and collectively towards realising their objectives.

"Before we stepped into the second phase in 2017, we have started to innovate and the then Vice Chancellor (Dr Mohd Harun), had suggested that why not we synergise these two (UMS and eco campus) to produce a new sector called eco campus tourism to help Sabah in promoting its important ecotourism sector since we are also the only full-fledged university in the state," Kueh said.

The key elements started from mindset change, involving everyone, meaning the students, staff, and visitors will have the opportunity to learn what is sustainability, greeneries and at the same time, they are able to have fun during

the tour around campus.

The UMS Eco Campus receives about 800-1,000 visitors daily and many of the foreign tourists came from China, Korea and Japan.

The agenda set out by Dr Mohd Harun was continued by his successors, Professor Datuk Dr D Kamarudin D Mudin and now Professor Dr Datuk Taufiq Yap Yun Hun who was appointed to the post in August 2019.

"I was one of the early members to sit among the committee and we try to brainstorm on how we are going to come out with products for the eco campus tourism, because you cannot just say you have this eco campus and yet with nothing to show," Kueh recalled.

And based on UMS' environmentally friendly setting, they have created five tourism packages based on the concept of nature tourism and sustainable or green tourism.

The packages are the gallery and museum tour, architecture heritage tour, sunset tour, nature tour, and nature education tour.

"We have seven galleries and museums in UMS which are distributed throughout the campus, showcasing our strengths and the most famous ones are the Aquarium and Marine Museum.

"We have a collection of Borneo, the knowledge and specimen housed in the Gallery Borneensis and we also have the Ibnu Sina Medical Museum in the medical faculty, as well as the UMS Research Gallery for keeping track of our historical records from the first batch of graduates, first convocation and so on," said Kueh, who himself was one of the first batch of graduates in UMS where he obtained a first class Bachelor Of Science degree in Conservation Biology before obtaining a Master Of Science degree.

On top of that, they have two showrooms in their libraries known as Nobel Laureate Collections and the Premier Collections exhibiting the publications, materials or books related to Malaysia's former and present prime ministers.

There are more exhibition halls on the way, such as the Tan Sri Azman Hashim Gallery featuring the works of fine art and the Islamic Museum in the near future.

"The galleries and museums were all started as teaching facilities before we reinvent them to be an exhibition centre for visitors," he said.

The university's building design featuring local and global values were promoted under the architecture heritage tour.

The UMS clock tower and Chancellery Twin Tower are considered as the most famous ones.

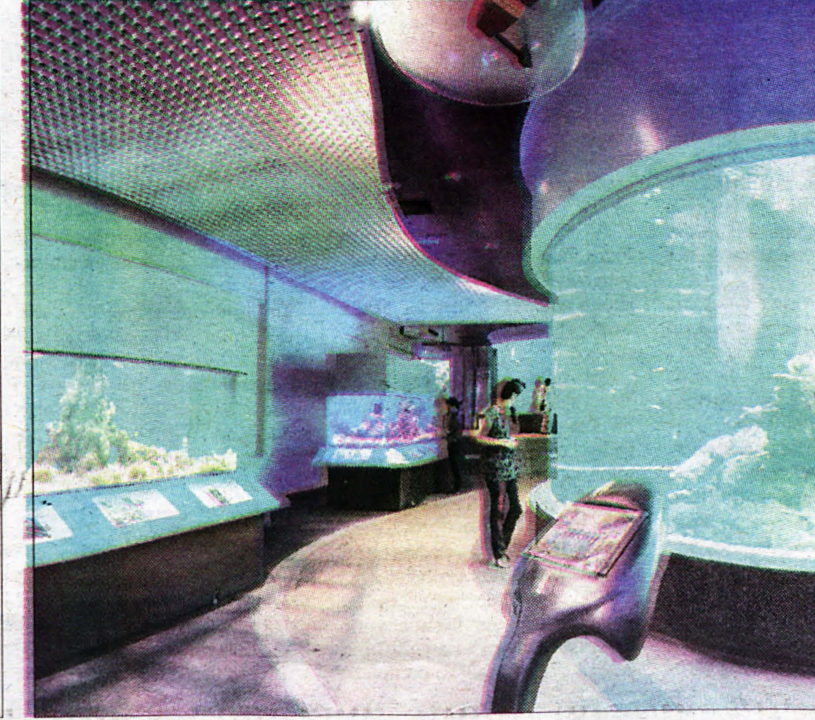
"The UMS clock tower was initiated by Dr Mohd Harun and the location of the clock tower is interesting because it is erected right in the middle of the straight line from the Chancellery Twin Tower to the main road.



UMS jetty and sunset.



Ibnu Sina Medical Museum.



UMS Aquarium and Marine Museum.



Kueh Boon Hee showing the upcycled products.

footprint inside the campus and to ensure easy accessibility for tourists and visitors.

UMS also has its own jetty managed by their Borneo Marine Research Institute, who works closely with the sunset cruise tour operators for docking their ships, where they must comply to strict regulations and maximum carrying capacity to make sure they don't disturb the coral and marine life in the jetty waterfront.

"We are now in the process of coming up with new activities and programmes to give tourists a hands-on experience to make upcycled products using discarded cake base, eggshells, tissue papers and many more," Kueh disclosed.

Besides the tour packages, he said some of the faculties are also offering their own tourism products, for instance, the Faculty of Engineering had built a three-metre jogging path using 30 per cent of waste plastic materials.

The UMS Eco Campus is open for tourists and visitors from 8am to 5pm and special arrangements can be requested for those who want to view the sunset at 6.30pm.

Tourists and visitors can spend unlimited time to explore the attractions inside the campus. The green ticket for international visitors is RM5 per person while it is free for Malaysians. The price for tour packages ranges from RM50 to RM100 per person.